

Title: Interview with Jesse Drewer

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Interviewer(s): Christian Ottey and Christopher Knorr

Interviewee: Jesse Drewer

Introduction: Jesse Drewer talks about his life living in Crisfield, from the ups to the downs, and giving his opinion on how things have been going, good and bad, for the town. He is hopeful for the future of Crisfield; however, he also mentions all the current issues that have yet to be solved by the town for many years, and how barriers are always going to be present in the face of progress.

[Transcription begins]

Christian Ottey (Ottey): All right, let's record. So we can just start off with just introductions, so, my name is Christian Ottey and this is Christopher Knorr. And we're here doing our Crisfield interview project for the oral histories in the Salisbury University Library with Jesse Drewer.

Christopher Knorr (Knorr): It's April 2nd, and it's 5 p.m. We've scheduled a one-hour interview from about 5 to 6.

Jesse Drewer (Drewer): Okay.

Ottey: Let's just kick it off with the first question then.

Drewer: Okay.

Ottey: So first question, how long have you lived in the Crisfield area and if you were born here in the Crisfield area, what was that like?

Drewer: I've lived in Crisfield all my life for all 29 years. It's been about the same my- my entire lifetime. It's pretty stagnant and slow, I will say.

Ottey: And you weren't- you weren't born in Crisfield, were you?

Drewer: Born in Salisbury, but lived in Crisfield my entire life, so.

Ottey: Do you think you could tell us anything about how Crisfield has changed, just, you said 29 years that you've lived there, so maybe over that time span, how has- how have things changed?

Drewer: A significant amount of flooding. The flooding has gotten far, far worse than- than it ever used to. Small amounts of flooding, now, it's every- every Friday or rainstorm. I mean, it's- it's nothing to have to get out boots that go up to your knees now to have to go downtown in the area. It has just become a common occurrence and it's not been really any new businesses in my lifetime that I've seen. I know there's some things on the development one side, but yeah.

Ottey: So why, what keeps you in Crisfield? Why have you lived there for the past 29 years?

Drewer: That's where my family is. That's where my family's always been. I'm actually looking, I mean, I'm building a house just outside of municipal area of Crisfield, but I like it. It's small. I'm not a fan of big-city area, and it's got the small-town charm still.

Ottey: You said you were- you were building a house right outside?

Drewer: Yes.

Ottey: Could you tell us a bit more about that project?

Drewer: Ah yes, I mean my family built a house in Crisfield, but it's still in a flood-prone- flood-prone area. And it's still, it's an elevated area, but still have hurricanes that flood the roads, not our house, but the roads getting to it and I'd like to avoid that so I'm building even further outside of about 10 miles outside of the city limits to still be close, but no flooding.

Ottey: I mean, have you had any problems with flooding while you're trying to build this- this new house?

Drewer: Not- not at my current site now. If it floods there, Crisfield is going to be pretty, pretty, pretty far gone. Yes.

Knorr: How do you- how do you entertain yourself in Crisfield? Are there any like community events that you regularly attend or?

Drewer: I mean, I'm involved with the Chamber of Commerce. So I mean we have our Crab Derbys and different events and things, but there isn't a lot, I mean, no movie theaters or really anything. I'm involved a lot with community activities. So I keep myself busy, but there's not a lot to do for people my age so.

Knorr: There any memories or anything that you- that like keep- obviously, you said you grew up there and everything. Is there any memory of like that you've cherished for Crisfield or is there anything that?

Drewer: Crab Derby and the Crab and Clam Bake are big important events and probably hear that from a lot of people, but it's kind of the Crisfield tradition is Crab Derby is Labor Day weekend, so that's kind school goes back, you expect cooler weather, it's kind of the end of crabbing season, everything kind of just, you know, it's just the end of summer and it's starting to falter through the years of not being able to succeed and thrive, but it's still hanging on.

Knorr: Right, I know we've heard a little bit about, if you go to that that Derby and the Crab thing, that it's almost, you visit Crisfield on a random day and it's, like you said, kind of a sleepy town, not much going on, but during that time it seems like the area definitely has a bit of a boost. It's almost like a completely different area at certain points during that.

Drewer: Yep, I mean, you've got the pageant, you got a crab cooking contest, there's, I mean, there's a carnival that comes in for the couple days, you have the annual crab races. It's kind of the heritage all rolled into a three-day weekend, but it's very important to local people.

Knorr: Yeah, would you say that that at least shows sign of maybe like development and potential there for Crisfield? You spoke on that there has been some development but not necessarily anything for those new businesses and everything coming in, but would you say that the area probably has potential to?

Drewer: The- the potential- the potential is there. I mean, the waterfront is just is absolutely beautiful. You won't get that anywhere- anywhere else, but it Crisfield's some challenges to overcome. Flooding is the primary one. They've got to get that under control to be able to see businesses thrive, and the big challenge is you're 13 miles down literally a dead end road. You've got have something that's going to make people want to drive down this long road out of the way to kind of the middle of nowhere so, but the potential is there.

Ottey: So do you have any- any memories of, that are directly tied with nature or like recreational activities that you like to do down in Crisfield?

Drewer: Not particularly me, I'm not an overly outdoors person, I will say. Really the only thing that I can think of is actually using a kayak during a flooding event. We actually kayaked down Main Street because the water was over two feet deep. You could actually have kayak races down Main Street. That- that kind of makes me think of, it was a- it was a bad time and there was a lot of damage because of it, but it was a people trying to make the best of it and kind of having a little bit of fun.

Ottey: There's a little recreation there, I guess.

Drewer: Yeah, I mean, yeah, I had someone trying to do a speedboat down Main Street and that didn't work out too well, but the kayaks worked out well.

Knorr: Kind of maybe shifting gears a little bit, but how do you personally prepare for flooding events or severe storms that may impact? I know you said it seems like for the long term, personally preparing is moving and- and building a house outside of that area, but currently how would you say that you prepare for stuff like that?

Drewer: Every true good Crisfielder has a pair of waterman's boots that we call them. They're- they're your water, your white boots that go almost up to your knees in some cases. I have two cars and I keep a pair in the trunk of both. You just- Crisfielders kind of just know you can look at it, someone out from out of town might come and see oh my gosh, you can't see the sidewalk. It's there. You just- you can just gauge being able to drive through it, but most people know keep a pair of boots, just keep an eye on the weather and sometimes it's worse than they say which is how we ended up with Hurricane Sandy. They weren't thinking it was going to be that bad and it was catastrophic for us. Other times they say move out of town and go away just like another Friday rainstorm for us. You get- you get to know the area and how the flooding actually works.

Drewer: So you brought up Hurricane Sandy. I was wondering if there are any- any storms or flooding events that you remember like most vividly. I'm- I'm sure Hurricane Sandy was one of them.

Drewer: Hurricane Sandy, yes, cause my family lost their home because of it. We have water up to my waist in- in- inside of my house. It was over five feet deep from if you were in my driveway to the inside of the house. It was catastrophic. I mean, we've lost vehicles, my house, everything. And it- it truly changed Crisfield because it- the vulnerability was always there, but I don't think people realized how truly vulnerable we are. People my generation hadn't had that once a 100 year that they used to say storm that it happened. And it's continually happening more frequently. It's not once 100 years anymore. It's becoming, we always have to be careful of a Nor'easter as they call them because that's gonna push the water right up into Crisfield. Crisfield's kinda like a bowl, it's got nowhere to drain to.

Knorr: Speaking on that, would you say that climate change then is something that people in Crisfield actively discuss and plan for, sort of like what you were just saying with the quote unquote, "once in a hundred years type of storm" that maybe isn't being once in a hundred years anymore?

Drewer: No, climate change is not a word Crisfielders use. They don't like the word. They associate it with government and it's about the same. It has about the same connotation that they don't like to hear it. Crisfielders is a little more receptive to it than say, Smith Island is to, we'll be here. We were here before the flooding, we'll be here after, but it is a- it is a very real situation that people need to understand how- how it works, and it's not just going to be let's just build a wall around it because it's- it still needs to be addressed and the city's doing a good job with working with FEMA trying to do some drainage and pumps and things but.

Knorr: Would you, so, would you say most of the resistance then is around that like buzzword of climate change, but maybe the- the actions of the city's government and the people are working on it, but not necessarily they don't like, like you said that words associated with government and it's more of a political buzzword, but it's not necessarily affecting the way like what you were saying Smith Island is a little bit more.

Drewer: It- it is a word that as soon- as soon as someone says that, you're- you're going to shut off a lot of local people. They don't, they automatically associate, they don't want to hear it. You have to be very careful around, say maybe tidal flooding versus saying climate change or increasing flooding versus it can mean the same thing, but it's how it's associated. Crisfielders are very known particularly for a born-here versus come-here attitude, and it automatically, if you're a come-here, I don't want to say you're thought down of, it all depends on who you're talking to, but some people will associate you're a come-here, you've only lived here. You could be a come-here and lived here 50 years. You're still a come-here. You were not born here, so you're kind of, I won't say ignored, but it's taken in a less light than someone who was genuinely born here. And you could have someone born here for 20 years and someone to come here that's lived here for 50. They're going to take the born here as a word first. That's just the nature of it.

Knorr: Do you think that maybe that could inhibit the development of Crisfield in some sense? I I don't know.

Drewer: It absolutely has. It- it- it has inhibited it. And it's a culture of change that's got to happen with it that, I think people are starting to understand it. It's just an older generation mentality that's always been there that, I won't say until that generation goes away, but it's a- it's a thought process that I mean, I don't generally think that way. But sometimes it's kind of the way I was brought up. You have to first question is, are you- were you born here? Were you raised here? That's it just kind of been baked into the mentality of the town and that does need to change, but do I think it will? Probably not for a long time.

Knorr: Right, so maybe that's just as much as the change can happen economically and physically to the area, maybe a mentality shift also would help.

Drewer: Yep.

Ottey: To follow up on that, with- with these increased flooding events and storm events, how would you say the city responds like, immediately to those, maybe with emergency services, or maybe like food and supply stocks?

Drewer: It has gotten better over- over recent years. The city is making a very good effort to try and respond. Ultimately the city does not have very good resources. They, it's just, it- it- it truly is something that would take the entire state of employees to be able to manage the way that it truly should be handled. The city does a good job with what resources they have, but it- I don't want to say it's half-baked, but until a more solution on how to fix the water flowing out other places, it's going to continue to happen and, is it- is it worth the response, I'll say. [pauses]

Knorr: Ah like, going a little bit with that and sort of like what you said when you're on different the member of the board and everything. Have you participated in any community events surrounding the issue of- of the flooding and everything?

Drewer: In my professional full-time capacity, I'm the planning director for Somerset County, so in my professional capacity, yes, I have. It's a very fine line for just me personally trying to split

the personal and professional differences that I have to be very cognizant of. But yes, I'm very invested in in the community. My parents own a business in the- in the community that's been there 55 years now and want to continue that to be there, but there's always- there's always challenges with some people. "I don't want government help, I don't want people on my property to look at how drainage could be fixed." And they might be the key to everything, but it all goes back to the mentality.

Knorr: Are there any projects or things you're working on that do kind of excite you for what's going on? I know you said the resources are kind of thin, and it would take a lot to really get what is needed, but with what you have, is there anything that's exciting?

Drewer: Yep, but they're out the county and the city together working on a drainage project to actually go and dig out a bunch of drains and things that I'll say have been overgrown that. It's a good thing. It's been, it's hitting some challenges because of some of the drains and things run across people's property. And the first thing you say is, "I'm from the county. I want to go and dig here." "Nope, you're not doing that. You're not." And you could have something 10 feet long. If you can't get to the middle of it, it defeats the whole problem. And it actually could cause worse problems for your neighboring people if we start and don't have- get all the way through it. So it's the overall concept has to change, but the city is doing a lot of things that they're- they're trying to do so.

Knorr: Could, do you think possibly like, an educational like awareness campaign could help with that? Like you said, it- it is tough maybe when people go in with an already preconceived notion of we're the city government trying to help with something and they're like immediately saying no. But could you see maybe that helping in any way and maybe getting people the- the educational side of how this could just help protect their land and everything?

Drewer: In a way, yes it, to- to be successful, you really have to understand the culture of this community. They're people who don't respond well to mail, they certainly don't respond to social media and emails and things. They're a community you really, we have this term at the county, meet them where they're at. You have to go to the local restaurant when they're all there on Saturday at 6 in the morning to get people who are otherwise very disconnected from the community, not saying that they're not involved or a power that the county utilizes, and it's not always the most popular, but it is successful as integrated into the churches, because Crisfield is still a very heavily religious community. And if you want to get some information shared, the best thing you can do is get in touch with the preachers, because they'll share it, they'll share it on a Sunday, and people will find out quicker that way than anything. And that's a key part of just understanding the community, because an email blast, posting it on Facebook, people aren't going to see that. Websites, we only just recently started getting high speed internet in the last two years. I mean even when I was in high school 11 years ago, parts of the town were still on dial-up internet. That it's just my generation knows to go to websites and Facebook but the older generation that you need to get in touch with, they don't.

Knorr: So a lot of the events that you're working on then you say it- it would be important to incorporate the history of Crisfield and like you're saying meet them where they're at. That's- that's more important to get people on your side than necessarily anything else of.

Drewer: Yes, I don't want to say you have to make them trust you, but it is- it is a mentality of if you first thing you come in say, "I'm from FEMA I'm here." You've already got a lot of pissed off people, start with trying to understand them before you get to why you're here because some people have the mentality there that you're only there to take from them or government overreach is a common thread in the local newspaper that the county wants more, the government wants more, what am I getting for my- for my more kind of mentality so. Even if it will benefit them, they don't always see it in that straight line.

Ottey: To follow up on the whole education topic, have you participated in or have even heard of the Crisfield Resilience Academy?

Drewer: I have- I have heard of it. I had two of my staff members from my full-time job actually participate in it at the end of March to the presentation for things that the county is doing for it.

Ottey: Because I know one of our- our students have visited one of the Crisfield Resilience Academy.

Drewer: Yep, I was- I was out of town for a couple- couple weeks and we got- we had two weekends to pick. So a couple of my staff members went and represented county efforts of what's going on and what we're doing to try and help. I heard it's been pretty well attended so.

Ottey: I was going to say, would you- would you say that's maybe an example of kind of meeting the people where they're at and trying to- to help with that, is that? Would that be an example for a successful, maybe, project to kind of help the? Because from what I know with the Resilience Academy, that's more of helping prepare for floodings on an individual level and helping like, yeah, prepare and for the storms and everything.

Drewer: For a certain demographic of people, I will say yes. If you're looking to get the true Crisfielders who are, I'll say die- die hard Crisfields, no, that's not the way to go. Because they're not gonna take four hours out of their Saturday to go sit there. They're out crabbing or they're out farming the back 40. They're not- they're not gonna go sit at the library. Some of these are people who probably have never set foot in the beautiful library that- that we have. It's- it's just your, that kind of thing, while it's been great, it's targeting people who are retired or are the retired move-heres. Or I'll say don't have anything else to do on a Saturday, they're not working. Especially during the season, crabbing season there, the watermen and the true people of the community, they're- they're- they're out on their boat. They're not gonna go sit there on a Saturday when there's money to be made and things to do.

Ottey: Yeah, do you think you could talk a bit more about the people that might be getting, like, left out of these educational events?

Drew: A lot of it is the- I'd say the 60 plus people that, I mean, that while they may not have a lot to offer for the town in the long term 20- to 30-year goals of the town's trying to fix a lot of things. They have a lot of historical knowledge that needs to be tapped into that may understand why this floods or understand why what was this before to how this is and just kind of like local history that people are younger generations moving away and the older ones are dying off. There's nobody to really tap into that information, and it's becoming more lost, I'll say. Cause I'm involved with the Heritage Foundation and things, you don't, you have members who have been members for 40 years. They're getting older and dying and memberships dropping because you don't have young people willing to come in and do a- do a story on to visitors on why this is important or do put together pictures for an exhibit or things. You just don't have that knowledge or they can put them together, but they're not gonna know what it is or what this plant that used to be here 30 years ago, what it truly meant to the community.

Ottey: Right, it's- it's sort of just like probably some of the projects you run and this project and other ones that are going on, like the Resilience Academy. It's not necessarily about trying to change the culture or the history of Crisfield, but kind of incorporate with them to help preserve that and to kind of restore the- the culture of Crisfield. You know, it was once the crabbing capital of the world. You know, you kind of, when we went down there we saw there was a mural that said that in one of the restaurants and everything like that's.

Drew: The claim to fame, I'd- I'd- I'd argue, I mean I, if- if it is, maybe- maybe, it truly was. I don't mean, that was clearly well, well before my time. But that's always been the moniker, is we're the crab capital of the world, I mean it, the potential's there. It's just you got to invest in the community. And I think that's where it's- it's fallen short. The community wants help. They need to be willing to roll up their sleeves and put it- put in the effort to get the effort back.

Ottey: I think a large part of trying to maybe change public perception about these issues or change the kind of culture in Crisfield is, you know, what- what's- what's the youth doing? You know, what- what are they kind of struggling with? I don't know if you know but if you maybe have any ideas.

Drew: There really truly is very, there is very little for the youth. I mean, there's- there's little league for younger kids. I mean there's- there's athletics related to public school system, but we don't have a movie theater or like skate park or anything. Those are important things. To me, it's- it's been stressed by locals in the community that the town needs to focus more on that. I am a differing of opinion on that- that. You can invest if you want to in those kind of things, but until you remediate your critical infrastructure, flooding and things like that, you can invest all you want too, but it's not gonna be there in 10 years. Why- why not place the effort on fixing critical infrastructure first? And, but I mean the- the park the- we have the state park in Crisfield that does activities for the youth. But a lot of people, I mean, you have to travel for things. You have to be willing to come to Salisbury. That's kind of the inherent part of- of Crisfield. I mean it's nothing for people to say, "I'm gonna drive to Salisbury to go get dinner." Well, you've only got one restaurant that's open on a Sunday. Everybody else is closed.

Ottey: I think- I think that's something we noticed, we actually just- just visited Crisfield just the other week.

Drewer: Hopefully you got to go to Gordon's.

Ottey: We had the other half of that. Yeah, we heard that too, but we had to divide of the places up between, you know, who is.

Knorr: That was something that we kind of noticed, though, like a little bit like what you're saying. There's not like even places like, I mean, you have the grocery store and then there's the McDonald's there, but there's no like Wawa or Royal Farms, like any of that stuff where maybe you wanna grab a snack and then even if you want to go to sort of friend's house or anything, there's nothing necessarily there.

Drewer: You go to Food Lion, you have a couple carry-out restaurants that are pretty similar in taste and you have Gordon's, which caters to a clientele all unique of its own. And I'm a big fan of them, but it- it's- it's a unique clientele for sure. They're 102 years old this year. (2025)

Ottey: So how would you say the maybe like the local economy then has changed, in particular some of the industries of fishing, crabbing, and then it seems like there was maybe a tourism, tourism industry that was kind of big that maybe in the summertime it peaks back up, but how has that kind of changed or affected over the years?

Drewer: Tourism, I would have to say probably is the- is the local economy driver and COVID changed a lot. We used to have a road scholar program that brought 20 people to Crisfield for a week every month during the summer. They stayed in the bed and breakfast, they went to the restaurants, they went into Smith Island for a day, they were heavily involved in the town that those kind of programs got shut down during COVID and they never returned. There's not an active program like that in Maryland anymore, and like it kept our museum had four staff, full four- four full time staff to keep things going. They took them to one of the restaurants every night that kept things going. It truly- it truly changed a lot and you just don't have, I mean, right now with the economy, just the global economy, the way this people don't had a lot of money to go do weekends and if they do, I hate to say it, Crisfield isn't the top, the place that you're going to do. You're going to go to Busch Gardens or you're gonna go to Great Wolf Lodge or Ocean City. You're go to those kind of places where they quite frankly have a lot more to offer unless you want to be off the beaten path. Go on vacation and cook your own meals and shop at the Crisfield Food Lion.

Ottey: So would you say maybe the businesses in general aren't doing too hot anymore? Or the the- or how does the future of the local businesses kind of look in Crisfield, and does the environment of the flooding and everything also maybe play a factor? Like you said, COVID is a- that's, you know, a very hard predictor of anything to- to know that was gonna happen and everything, but it did happen and then you got to deal with it. But are there any, what does the future look like? And does the- does the title flooding and everything ever play a factor?

Drew: Flooding impacts a lot because if you go actually in downtown Crisfield, where four of our restaurants are and everything, sometimes when the flooding happens, you can't even get to them. Sometimes they'll have to close their doors and barricade with sandbags in front of the doors, because if not, the flooding is gonna come in. So it greatly impacts the businesses where they're at. And we've got a restaurant that's pretty decent, right literally at the- at the city dock, right on the water's edge. But they have to close once a week when high tides get so bad that you. It doesn't physically enter their store, but you can't walk on the sidewalks or walk or park nearby to get in into their front door. It's- it's a growing, growing concern.

Ottey: You, um, you mentioned earlier that your parents had a business in Crisfield, so do you know anything about how they've been impacted with their business?

Drew: A lot of electricians in the construction industry, 95% of our business does not come from even inside- inside of Crisfield. There are some things, but development does not really happen in in Crisfield. There's not been any real, I'd say, real reason to build in Crisfield. Without bluntly blaming the city, there's not really a lot the city can offer as far as development interests in Crisfield when you can go just outside of the city, not flood. You're still able to connect to public water and sewer services. You don't have to worry about really being landlocked. And I mean, there's, the potential is there for Crisfield. They've just got to find a way to get the flooding under control and I'd say it'd probably really market, there- there's- there's a market for people that want to go off of the beaten path. I mean, I reference St. Michael's all the time, look at the nature of that town, it is down a dead-end road. I mean, you have to have a reason to want to all the way down there, but people love it. I mean their bed and breakfast restaurants are flourishing. People will go off the beaten path for things, you just have to make it worth their while.

Ottey: Well, and sort of like what you said, it's the- the view at Crisfield, the water itself. That area is a very naturally desirable place for people to go and you, yeah, and St. Michael's is a- is a perfect example of- of a thriving example of, you know, a dead-end road that sort of people want to go in. Do you think that there's some ways that the economy could be helped to get to a St. Michaels? Do you, are there any, your personal opinions on maybe how to, to get there or?

Drew: Yes, it's been talked about for over 20 years to have a ferry in Crisfield they are or either a ferry to somewhere else or be part of a chain that has actually come into fruition that Somerset County along with three other counties in the state paid for a professional study done to basically build out a ferry system and they're actively working on that right now to make Crisfield a- you'd be able to go from Crisfield to St. Mary's and go- go- go across the bay. You may want to go to St. Mary's for a weekend. I personally never been because I could go on a boat in 30 minutes, but it'd take me four hours to go up the shore and back down to that area. There is potential. There was a talk about linking Crisfield and St. Mary's to with the ferry system. They built the city dock with the infrastructure to have a ferry there. It's just getting that together and it would basically help because it wouldn't necessarily be a true dead end. You would be able to ferry on to somewhere else.

Ottey: Yeah, I mean that's a huge draw to, you know, the draw in the comparison with St. Michael's that I think is pretty good because that's, St. Micheal's, there's a huge influx of oftentimes very wealthy people on their boats that will come in and dock and there's plenty of stuff.

Knorr: They have that ferry docks route too.

Ottey: Yeah, exactly.

Drewer: And well, Crisfield has a state-of-the-art marina that is beautiful, 500 slip marina that's run by the state. It- it- it is beautiful. It's a protected cove and everything where it's at. The potential is there for people to come in and we have beautiful condos right on the waterfront. So there, the potential's there. It just getting to it.

Ottey: And like you said, the flooding is just the main barrier of entry.

Drewer: There- there- there are a lot of barriers, but I'd say that is the critical one, because anything else is going to fail under that, because you've got to get that under control; otherwise, why are you investing money into an area that is- is going- is going into flood? And I mean, look, I was, I always reference when talking to people, look at New Orleans, I mean they're literally in a bowl, they're under, they are under sea level, and they thrive and have, I mean, I personally visited New Orleans a couple years ago and it was, it was wonderful. I thought it was amazing and like they built this infrastructure for a town that's two feet below sea level and they make it work. And outside of a cat five like Hurricane Katrina, which I don't know that you can even build a system to withstand that, you can- you can engineer it and it can be done. It's just finding the way to do it that also protects the natural beauty that is Crisfield without doing damage to the environment but keeps the water where you want the water to be.

Ottey: I wanted to circle back around to when you were saying, for your parents' home and everything, and they had to, you said it was kind of destroyed and they have to rebuild it and everything. What kind of resources did you lean on when repairing your house or dealing with the damage, or your parents when they were dealing with the damage?

Drewer: This was right after Hurricane Sandy when, I mean, there was a lot of disaster groups going in the community. There was the Mennonite Disaster Service and the Maryland Emergency Management that were in the community. I mean, there were hundreds of homes destroyed. We were better off than most because at the end it was just property damage, I mean. We did, I mean, we lost furniture and our home, essentially, and vehicles but it- it- it could have been worse. I mean, there were- there were deaths involved, but I mean we were fortunate if we were able to move out to- to a temporary location and actually sell the house after it was fixed back up and move outside of the flood area. But not everybody was that lucky and the town has been very blessed with having a partnership with the Mennonite Disaster Service because they've gone and rebuilt close to 100 homes that if you ride through town, it's very hard not to turn around and find one. That's elevated six feet up higher now that you can see. They're very noticeable. It started out as a small few replacements and now you'd be hard

pressed to find a street that doesn't have at least five of them on there that they've been very good partners to the town trying to help. Crisfield is a very low-income community that there's a lot of people on social security or just survivor benefits or things of that nature that would not be able to afford this. And we just have to keep dealing with repetitive losses that the disaster groups have kind of really, I'll say loved Crisfield for that, they loved the nature of it.

Ottey: So it seems, you know, your opinion on relocation based on is kind of the- the route that you've chosen to go in. But have you seen a lot of your friends or family? Is that also the route that others have chosen or are there some that have chosen to kind of try to stay in the more prone areas? And is that something that, or what's- what's the trend, I guess, around?

Drewer: It- it- it- it truly depends on the property and where people are at. I mean, my family had only lived in the house that we were in for about maybe 20 years that my family lived in the house that we lived in that got flooded. Some people have history that goes back my grandparents were born in this house that are heavily invested in this that they're working the route to elevate their existing homes which the county is working with people to help provide matching money and things to elevate homes so they can stay right where they are. And that's where a lot of the infrastructure has got to come in. The homes won't be flooded anymore, but your streets and access to get to them still are very vulnerable. Yes, you may be in a house that's elevated up, but if someone has a heart attack or an emergency that needs an ambulance, critical services still are going to have to go through flooded water to get to people. And that's an important factor that can't be understated enough.

Knorr: Yeah- yeah, there have been a lot of homes that have been lifted, and that seems to be the prominent ideology behind, you know, staying, let's lift these homes up. But you've alluded to, would you say the biggest challenge of that is what you just said of trying to, of all the other, that's only for your one individual property, but there's still so much infrastructure that.

Drewer: And the cost, it's very expensive to elevate a home. It's- it's not, I'd say, and depending on the size of the home, it could be easily \$100,000. That's not a small amount of money for people to invest in their homes. And some people are looking at, well, let me elevate my yard. Well, that causes a two-fold effect because it fixes your home. But all you're doing is draining the water to somebody else's house, who may not have flooded before, but now they are. You're- you're feeling like you're doing a good thing, but you're hurting your neighbor. It has a double-edged sword effect to it that there has to be other methods along with elevating to get the water where it needs to be kind of thing, so.

Ottey: To kind of speak more on that- that idea of like the collateral damage, have there been any projects that have led to more- just more damage in the long term? Or maybe with the rebuilding of homes, are they being rebuilt to drain flooding better, or are they just not?

Drewer: Their- their homes are being built to drain off of the property that they are, but they may be forcing it onto other properties that that didn't flood before and like some projects, like I mentioned earlier, we're digging out, digging out ditches. Well, if you've started digging it out and you can't get permission to go to this property, all you're doing is creating an even worse

area. You've dug more holes in the ground for more water to get into that until you can get that finished. It is possible to make things worse and you want, you obviously don't want that to happen, but it is very possible for it to happen.

Knorr: Do you think the younger generations are maybe less likely to stay in Crisfield, or what is your experience on that?

Drewer: I would say yes. I mean, I look back and family members of, I mean, graduating classes that used to be 100- 100 classmates and they were all- all staying in town. I graduated in 2014 and I had a class of 60 and that was a- that was one of the biggest classes to come through in a- in a number of years. Crisfield High School from 8th to 12th grade had 300 people in it. That's quite- quite a number when you look at some schools that- that's the size of some people's whole or one grade level. There's got to be something to offer people and I'm a person I don't mind driving. I mean, I drive to Salisbury quite frequently. I mean, I drive 30 minutes to work. Some people genuinely don't want to do that and it's just, I mean, I look at some of them, over half of my class does not live here anymore. They live in maybe the Eastern Shore area or state of Maryland, but they have- but they don't live in Crisfield. You've got to really want to be willing to be off the- off the beaten path.

Ottey: So you, so, you'd say you haven't seen like a large number of the young Crisfield youth kind of just growing up and leaving Crisfield. I mean- I mean, certainly that's still happening.

Drewer: It- it- it- it does happen, I mean, it- it all depends on the family history and what- what their career path is. I mean some people want to follow the family's tradition and be watermen or be farmers and they stick around the area because that's just this area, that's what this area is, but some people want, I know a couple of my classmates want to get into like computer and game design. That is certainly not nothing you're going to do in Crisfield, much less the Eastern Shore of Maryland. You've got to go to big cities for things like that. It- it- it- it is slowly dying. I don't care to argue with them by the say it isn't, it is. And there has to be a reinvestment in that regard.

Knorr: To maybe switch gears a little bit, and I know you said it's tough with your personal opinion and professional opinion, but what are your general opinions of how the city has kind of handled the flooding issue?

Drewer: I would- I would- I would say fair. I mean there- there are things that they could do better if they had the resources. I mean, a lot of it comes down to financial resources. I mean, they could do more if they have it. They genuinely don't have a very good tax base, so they can't afford good pumps. They can't to maintain things the way they truly should be and it's a repetitive cycle. Well, you buy a cheaper quality something because that's what you can afford. Well, don't expect it to hold up when you need it the most. That ends up causing more damage, that you have to fix the damage plus the pump. And it's just a- that kind of mentality that there has to be some way to look at what they're spending on and it's been a conversation by a lot of people to consider deincorporating the town and just letting the county take over the land. So you wouldn't have to spend on city staff, you would have to spent on a police force and things,

and that has its own complications. Cause that means county has to take over doing things, but also it would be a savings to citizens because they wouldn't be double-taxed, you wouldn't get city and county tax. So there- there are very extreme ways to fix things, but a lot of it revolves around federal and state grants and funding to fix it, and I see that in a double-edged sword because as a taxpayer you want your money to go the best good, is funding a town of 5,000 people versus fixing a major issue in a major town worth worthwhile spending, it all depends on your viewpoint. But I think overall the town is doing a good job. I- I hope that they can continue on the trend that they're going on to see improvement things. The new mayor has been very, very active in lobbying things. So I do see the potentials there.

Knorr: Would you say that most people's viewpoint and opinions and voices are being heard, maybe by the new governor or mayor, sorry.

Drew: I would say- I would say it's- it's fair. I mean, they- they did just hold a public town hall meeting yesterday that allowed citizens to be more vocal. The rules that they have right now are not very friendly, they don't offer you a chance to talk to the public until after they voted on something, which is kind of pointless at that point, that they're looking at changing their rules and procedures and how they do things. And they've been, the mayor's been very open to changing that and not a, well, this is the way it's always been, so we're going to keep it mentality it is. We might keep it, but you need to explain, why is it this way? It's not just because we've always done it. And sometimes you do need to question the status quo on things. [pauses]

Knorr: Are you hopeful for the future of Crisfield? Where would you see it, or where would you like to see it heading in, say, 20, 30 years?

Drew: I'd like to see it still there and as a tourist place. I mean, I'd love to see people taking a ferry to Crisfield for the Crab and Clam Bake weekend and coming and staying in the- in the marina and looking at things or shopping in the restaurants or things. But there's challenges to get there, but I would like to see and I do feel like they're on- they're on the right path. It's just following through with what they've got in front of them is the most crucial thing. [pauses]

Knorr: Yeah, so it's- its, the- I guess the sort of the changes are, or the goal would be similar to like the St. Michael's and the ferry and then that would come with, do you think that the- to speak earlier of what you were saying with the changing of the mindset, would that be something that people would need to change around or is that something that's generally liked by the community of like a ferry, and a St. Michael's vibe, that would seem to a little bit against always here versus, you know, you came here.

Drew: It does and I mean that- that is part of that. That's a challenge, that's always going to be there with- with this community is change, changing the mindset. And you're never going to win everybody over. I can tell you that right now it is never going happen. It not might happen, it might happen somewhere, but it won't- it won't happen in Crisfield. And a lot of projects I won't say are really kind of beaten to death. They're talked about for a number of years. And sometimes they don't always happen right away. People said, "Well, that's been talked about 10

years. It ain't ever going to happen. I'll be dead before that happens." And that is a big problem is, there's not always a lot of follow-through or things are kind of prematurely done and the public genuinely thinks it's gonna happen. And when nothing does, they get upset, but it wasn't ready to be, I'll say revealed about what- what they're going on onto just yet.

Ottey: To follow up with that question, have the youth at all been involved in these resilience projects or have they been involved at all in trying to maybe change what the status quo in Crisfield is?

Drewer: I- I don't have a whole lot of knowledge as that goes. I know the mayor just did it last week, started a youth council to try and get more kids involved, more high school kids and things of that nature involved in city affairs. Whether that actually has an effect remains to be seen. I know they've tried it in the past. Yeah, it just, it really is a- is a generational thing if people want- if people really do want to be in this off-the-beaten-path place or willing to drive an hour to places and that, I mean, that's what it comes down to. Me, I'm somebody who quite enjoys that. I- I- I- I don't mind driving just to get on the water and be away from everything, but it comes down to some people and guess their value of time.

Ottey: Speaking of time, we have just about like seven minutes left until six, so if we have any more questions or.

Knorr: Yeah, just the kind of like the last two, you kind of touched on. It sounds like you would recommend Crisfield as a place to live if it's something that people would kind of go to if they wanted off the kind of beaten path and everything, but what words of wisdom would you share with future generations that are- that would move to Crisfield or as it maybe and hopefully develops and grows and stays?

Drewer: Words of wisdom. I'm trying to say don't try and change the locals because it's- it's- it's- it's- it's not going to happen. You- you- you have to be genuine in what you're trying to do. You can't try to like a bait and switch on local people, because they're going- they're going to see through it. They know this area, they know things. Be up- be upfront about it. You may not get a good result, but explain what it is that you're trying to do and you- you might- you might be surprised because some people might be instantly put off if you say you're from the government or different things trying to help, but if they can see you're being genuine and have a desire and passion to try and make the town better, you're more than likely will succeed. And you just kind of really just have to love- love where you are.

Knorr: It's kind of like you said, it's a little bit of that mindset of meet the people where they're at to help kind of ease them into it.

Drewer: Don't storm in there and expect them to sign right up for things or have a whole lot of, you've got to go to where the locals are cause this is a community that hearsay travels faster than- than the truth does, and you just need to get it out there right away what it is that you're trying to do because sometimes word of mouth travels very quickly through- through Crisfield

and just need to recognize that that it, things- things will spread around quickly so just need to kind of work together too on that.

Knorr: What seems like the good thing though about Crisfield from like talking to you and hearing about the people is that there is a lot of pride in being from Crisfield and or living in Crisfield, whether you moved there and what not. So there's definitely the fundamentals to- for potential to grow and everything but there's definitely the, you know.

Drewer: Oh yeah, the- the- the- the potential is there, it's just you've got to tap into it in the right way, and I think things are moving in a positive trend. It just got- got to have that follow-through, but the potential's there.

Knorr: I think that's everything I got.

Ottey: I have no, no more follow-ups for him, so.

Drewer: Okay.

Knorr: All right. Well, thank you for your time.

Drewer: Thank you.

Knorr: Thank you for giving us.

Drewer: Hopefully, you find a lot of information about Crisfield.

Ottey: Yeah, I mean we certainly have been over the course of maybe the past two weeks. We've been getting really deep into this project so.

Drewer: Well, that's good to know.

Knorr: Oh, thank you.

Drewer: Thank you.

Ottey: Thank you again.

[Transcript ends]